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AUTHOR Wexler, Stephen J.
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ABSTRACT

Learner centered reform is what the major shift in emphasis in the 1972 education amendments concerned. Through the adoption of the Basic Grant Program and a program of institutional aid following the student, the federal government has said that it will no longer put the emphasis on the dispensers of education. This has been strengthened by the cutbacks in institutional aid flowing from research grants. What Congress opted for was a consumer-oriented program that puts its faith in the students. Another major change in the 1972 amendments was the enlargement of the scope of federal assistance to postsecondary training outside colleges and universities. Congress is seeking to insure that every dollar spent has a result that is measureable. The higher education community must continue to work to insure that the Federal Government is supportive of programs that will make the nation's education offerings not only available to as many as possible, but also of a quality that is desirable. (Author/PG)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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SHAPING THE NEW LEGISLATION*

Stephen J. Wexler
Counsel, Subcommittee on Education
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

It is most timely, for the Subcommittee on Education of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare is now starting work on the reconsideration of all of the higher education programs presently in law. I am sure many of you are aware of the 1972 bill and the major new directions which that legislation took. These are the programs which we will now be studying.

Our work this year will be more in the form of oversight. The various higher education programs will be considered as to their effectiveness. Are they doing the job Congress intended them to accomplish? If the answer is no, we will seek to find out why and what can be done to attain that goal. This, of course, means that we shall always be questioning these goals as well. However, I do not believe that the Subcommittee will adopt any major new program or change the thrust of the present federal programs.

This conference has as its central motif learner-centered reform. This is interesting, for, to my mind and to many members of Congress, learner-centered reform is exactly what the 1972 amendments were about, for they embodied a major shift in federal emphasis, a shift to the student--in other words--the learner. All too often, the Congress is accused of being two or three years behind the times. In this regard, however, Washington seems to have led the reform; now, conferences such as this are popularizing the idea.

In reading the literature which has been published it seems clear that people really have not understood what philosophic changes took place through the adoption of the 1972 amendments. The battle--and there was a battle--appeared to be a simple argument about delivery systems between proponents of across-the-board institutional aid and those who wanted to have the institutional aid follow the student. On the face of it, this is a correct statement. However, I believe that the Senate, in strongly advocating its position of having the aid follow the students, said very clearly that there will be a change of emphasis from having the institution as the major recipient of an operative agent for federal programs of aid to higher education; we opted to lessen the responsibility of the colleges and universities in administering the federal programs of financial aid. No new major categorical programs were enacted; what was enacted was a new program of student assistance completely at variance with the approach to the then-existing programs. We have created a direct federal/student relationship instead of the federal/institutional relationship which had previously been the case.

The already-established programs of student assistance were continued, but as complements to the Basic Grant Program, which was to become the major vehicle. One of the criticisms of those old programs was that, since they were administered at each school, there was a disparity in that a student might be eligible for assistance at one school, while another with the same income situation was not eligible at a sister institution. There are some in the Senate who, even today, would like to do away with college-based programs of student financial aid and put a greater emphasis on the Basic Grant Program. I do not agree, for I believe that there is a role for the college-based programs.

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Given greater funding and a real commitment to the Basic Grant Program by student financial aid officers, both programs should be possible.

Accompanying the Basic Grant Program and emphasizing the changed thrust of federal concentration was a program of institutional aid which followed the student. This method was opposed by the major groups lobbying for higher education, who wanted most of the federal funds placed with the institutions. The argument turned on how institutional aid would be allocated. It was resolved by providing aid only if the schools are shouldering a federal burden, i.e., if they are institutions supporting federally-aided youngsters. This was probably a wise decision, and one which will bear the test of a Supreme Court case in the matter of federal aid to private colleges--cases about which are now being considered.

Through the adoption of those two programs, the federal government has said that we will no longer put the emphasis on the dispensers of education; we will no longer give them the lion's share of federal funds. And, with the cutback in institutional aid flowing from research grants, this has been even more clear. What the Congress opted for was a consumer-oriented program which puts its faith in students, and, if any reform is learner-centered, the presently existing program of institutional aid is.

Another major change opted for in the '72 amendments was the enlargement of the scope of federal assistance beyond that which we had originally defined as higher education--in other words, the Committee studied postsecondary training outside of the colleges and universities. The 1972 amendments made all federal programs of student assistance available to all accredited postsecondary institutions. The Subcommittee's hearings and studies had made it clear that there was a large body of students who found that, after high school, they could not find the training they wanted or did not want to attend a regular college or university. They did, however, wish to pursue some type of occupational training at a proprietary job training school. It was also found that, while much publicity had been generated about certain schools which operated in less than an ethical manner, many people who attended technical training schools received good value for their money and gained a useful occupational skill upon completion of their schooling. Therefore, another major reform of the higher education bill was to put those students on an equal footing with their counterparts who preferred to follow a more academic approach to life.

I will not go through all of the 1972 amendments, but I think that these areas of federal action should be understood. The fact that we in Washington have taken action with regard to learner-centered reform is the utmost possible evidence that we are aware of it. The question is, what comes now? What is the future of not only higher education but of all postsecondary education in the next few years as seen from the Washington perspective?

We are hearing more and more about the need for education to be tied to career development, occupational training, and vocational training. In these times of budgetary problems, it has become very fashionable to study present programs with one rather limited criteria for success; we are soon to look only for tangible results, or, to put it in a slangy way, more "bang for the federal buck." Congress is seeking to insure that every dollar spent has a result that is measurable. Accountability and means of measurement are the vogue. We see the resurrection of those tables which show that graduates with college diplomas make "X" amount of money more than those students who terminated their formal education after high school.

On a philosophic basis, many of us who work on legislation have an ingrained distrust of attempts to quantify the social sciences. In trying to measure every output, there is a tendency to put values on learning which cannot really be translated into numbers and qualities. Since the advent of Sputnik and all of the money which has been poured into the physical sciences, together with the massive waste in the rocket program, we have seen educators and social scientists try to justify their disciplines through the use of quantifying data and computer science. All of a sudden, education and other social sciences have become totally measurable. In my own field of legislation, political scientists create great equations and put them into computers which will then predict any given legislative situation. The Journal of the American Political Scientists Association is filled with pages of sines and cosines which will predict all manner of legislative result, but who can understand them? While all of these quantifications of data are impressive, they exclude the human factor. There was no way to predict the shift of federal emphasis on education in the 1972 amendments; the computer would have come a cropper. There is a great fear on the Hill that these social scientists and their accompanying reams of data will gain ascendance in the academic world.

In the effort to wring every benefit from the federal dollar, we may opt for what may be a mistake in approach toward education. Pressures are growing which could result in the adoption of amendments to federal legislation to reflect the view of higher education as nothing more than an adjunct to the public job training program. The concept of education as a means of developing the mind and the ability to think, read, and amuse ourselves could be lost; students may be urged to develop on a one-dimensional level, rather than in a fully-rounded manner.

This one-sided approach appears to discount the fact that, in the future, we will be in a situation where an individual's total job time will be thirty hours or less. With such short hours, that individual will have to be trained or prepared to utilize that leisure time. True, the Congress could ignore that possibility and do nothing to stop the debt to a nation of bowlers or one which spends a great deal of time sitting in a chair in front of the television set, but the Congress does not find that to be a happy prospect.

There is no attempt to try to resurrect the old plea for a return to the strict liberal arts degree and elitism of pre-World War II. Nor are exaggerated claims made about the desirability of that happening. There is a strong belief that the liberal arts are valuable and that there should be a place, and federal support, for an individual who wants to pursue that type of study. The nation's businesses and industries should recognize the value of the liberal arts graduate and not just demand career trained individuals. There should be a place for both.

You, as educators, should recognize this drift in our national thinking. You must establish curriculums which are truly responsive to the students' needs, but the Congress does not expect to react to every whim and current trend of that which comes around. There is no Congressional demand to make everything relevant. Adults do bring a certain perspective to their views which youngsters can benefit from. As you talk about responsive curriculums and the desirability of youngsters being trained for specific careers, there should also be a recognition of the value of those youngsters becoming individuals who can read Shakespeare and appreciate the arts and music.

What we are seeking is a matter of balance. The mistake made in the 1950's was a blind reliance on science and technology as the answer to specific problems. The problems of today, outside of the energy situation, are human in nature. They revolve around intrapersonal relationships. They call for understanding of those from alien cultures. Citizens who are trained for specific tasks and who cannot bring into their thinking other values or understandings of human relations will not be able to cope with these difficulties.

There is one other point which should be discussed for it has a direct bearing on what is enacted by the Congress. That point is the whole concept of federal control through government regulation.

Recently, President Kingman Brewster of Yale University, discussed in a very erudite way this question of government involvement in universities. I must admit that some of the activities of our Subcommittee on Education may have perhaps heightened this situation. The Congress will never opt for government control, but a series of acts, all taken out of good intentions, will nevertheless bring about government control. For example, what makes more sense than using the Social Security number for all public, personal, and private transactions? It is economical and cost effective but has vast social implications. There is a fear that, as we take small steps toward utilizing that Social Security number for all that is good and true, like the collection of student loans we may find ourselves locked into a vast edifice of control.

In education, we have seen federal funds used as a fulcrum for affirmative action (which leads to quotas), student privacy rights, parental rights, and faculty rights. The universities do not receive payment for their services in enforcing federal policy. More importantly, this kind of control reduces the type of academic freedom that we have long enjoyed. Therefore, as you think about the federal role in education, you should also keep in mind the old adage that he who pays the piper calls the tune. And don't think that there must be aid at a 51% level to gain control--total control could occur at far less than that figure.

This conference is a rather in-depth, sophisticated discussion of the very problems of higher education which need to be resolved and of the redirection which is necessary in order to reflect the needs of the students. But a conference without an end or a result is meaningless. The question can be asked: "How can this conference be translated into action?" I will not discuss the most apparent answer, which is to reform your own classes, departments, or universities. This is an area which should be self-triggered and in which the heavy hand of the federal government should be withheld. We in Washington can be called upon in a somewhat limited way.

The major thing to remember is that our legislation is not specific in its approach. The federal government does not dot every "i" or cross every "t." Rather, it creates a general program under which all options could be utilized and experimented with. In a year, if you look for results of this conference as a specific piece of law, you won't find anything; however, results will be there, because the legislation will allow for experimentation with various options and new approaches. Therefore, one of the results of the conference would, I hope, be an approach to the Congress, to let us know how the present law can be amended to be more learner-centered, and also, of course, what new ideas should be adopted to attain that same end.

The Subcommittee wants to be of help and assistance. The members hope to continue the view of education legislation as an ever-evolving entity. But this can only be done with your assistance and strong support.

We must continue our work to insure that the federal government is supportive of programs which will make the education offering in our nation's colleges and universities not only available to as many as possible, but also of a quality which is desirable. We cannot have education which reflects the lowest possible denominator. John Dewey, whose work has recently attracted even more criticism, pointed out that "What the wisest among us would want for their children, that must be the education for all." This is an end, a goal, which the Congress will continue to strive for.